

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 370 646

JC 940 351

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TITLE Who's in the Driver's Seat, the Budget or the Strategic Plan: Which Comes First?
PUB DATE Feb 94
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented the International Conference for Community College Chairs and Deans (3rd, Phoenix, AZ, February 23-26, 1994).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Budgeting; *College Planning; Community Colleges; *Department Heads; Departments; Mission Statements; Needs Assessment; Program Improvement; Program Proposals; *Strategic Planning; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

In an era of diminishing public resources, community college departments need a budgetary system in which options are clearly spelled out, consequences projected, priorities delineated, and budget requests made that are functional and provide useful results. Unfortunately, few colleges and even fewer departments are developing and utilizing such systems. Department chairs, in their budgetary submissions, may do little more than roll over previous years' requests. Discussions with department chairs indicate that many institutions go through planning exercises designed to create documents rather than to produce useful changes in the organization. A well-developed strategic planning process includes input from all department members and stimulates dialogue on the departments' purpose. Moreover, it should be a structured process including the following six specific steps: (1) departmental values are clarified and a mission statement developed; (2) department strengths and weaknesses are analyzed; (3) key areas for attention are identified and goals developed for these areas; (4) specific operational plans are developed to accomplish those goals; (5) the plan is implemented; and (6) results are evaluated, leading to further plan development. Once priorities and actions have been developed, the budgetary process becomes simplified as departments merely request funds to accomplish the goals they have developed. Another advantage is that expectations between the administration and department become very clear when requests are based on thought-out plans. (KP)

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WHO'S IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT, THE BUDGET OR THE STRATEGIC PLAN:
WHICH COMES FIRST?

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Paper presented at the International Conference
for Community College Chairs, Deans, and Other Instructional Leaders
3rd, Phoenix, Arizona, February 23-26, 1994.

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WHO'S IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT, THE BUDGET OR THE STRATEGIC PLAN: WHICH COMES FIRST?

Planning and budgeting. Perhaps two of the most important issues influencing the activities and success of your department. How these two are conducted and connected will have a great deal to do with how successful your department will be in responding to the dynamic environment in which community colleges and your department find themselves. How are these two issues conducted and/or connected at your community college? How are they connected in your department?

In an era of diminishing public resources, if we are going to effectively compete for those resources as colleges and departments, we must devise ever more effective demonstrations of the critical nature of our functions and the effective use to which our funds are to be utilized. This implies a system in which options are clearly spelled out, consequences of proceeding or not proceeding projected, priorities precisely delineated, and budget requests made which are functional and which will provide positive and useful results. A process of strategic planning, and budget requests based on that planning fulfills the parameters of such a system. Unfortunately, few community colleges, and even fewer departments, are developing and utilizing such systems.

More likely scenarios, from our experience, find that planning and budgeting may have little or no relationship. Department chairs, in their budgetary submissions, may do little more than roll over previous years' requests with the attitude that "we can plan anything we want, but we know that there won't be any funds". Budget requests typically become either blue-sky wish lists or routinized, rolled-over-from-last-year, status quo annual submissions. In addition, the planning and budgetary processes are often conducted in isolation by the department chair with little input from faculty.

The process of strategic planning has descended to the higher educational world from corporate and more recently not-for-profit organizations. In the last few years it has gained some acceptance and use by community college planning offices for the purposes of college-wide planning. Our experience and conversations with department chairs indicate, however, that it is still little understood or used at the academic departmental level.

The purpose of this paper and the concurrent session workshop is to discuss the elements of effective planning, to introduce the concept of strategic planning and describe its components, and to talk about how department chairs and deans can utilize the strategic planning process to most effectively compete for and utilize budgetary resources.

EFFECTIVE PLANNING

An old adage about effective organizations notes that there are three kind of organizations -- those that make things happen, those that watch things happen, and those that wonder 'what happened?'. Effective planning is designed to be a tool for your department to make things happen which will enable it to flourish, to succeed, and to best serve the constituencies toward which its enterprise is directed.

Unfortunately, in our discussions with department chairs from around the country, we have noticed that many of their departments and their academic institutions go through planning exercises that seemed designed more to create a document than to actually produce useful changes in the organization. It is vital to understand, however, that an effective planning process is one that is not merely done on a ritualistic basis for the purpose of having a planning document on file. An effective planning process is one that is focused on changing and elevating the way that a department or college thinks and acts. The plan itself, which is the product of the planning process is secondary in importance to the change in the quality of thinking and acting which results from planning. It is the active, dynamic and ongoing planning process which produces changes and results for your college, for your department, and for the communities and individuals which you serve. Effective planning must produce results. Otherwise, why do it?

STRATEGIC PLANNING VERSUS TYPICAL ANNUAL PLANNING PROCESSES

A typical annualized planning process might involve mapping out a series of goals or objectives which the department aspires toward in a coming year. In my own history, these were typically produced each year in isolation by department and divisional chairs and became a part of a large, generally inactive, college-wide document. These plans tended to be somewhat generalized, with fuzzy goals and objectives which were diffuse in nature, which were difficult to measure, and which were seldom referenced again.

A well developed strategic planning process, by contrast, includes input from all of the members of the department or community, stimulates dialogue on essential purposes of the department, and utilizes information on the external environment in which the department operates as well as the internal resources which it possesses to respond to that environment. It is especially focused on developing a clear sense of your department's priorities, on empowering members of your department to participate in the development of those priorities, and in providing a foundation for their participation in relevant activities. It includes sequences of specific tasks to be performed, detailed schedules and deadlines for their accomplishment, and the assignment of responsibility for completion. It also includes provision for the measurement, evaluation, and refinement of the plan as the undertaking of its specific tasks proceeds.

STRATEGY VERSUS METHODS

A key to understanding the power of a strategic approach for your department lies in understanding the concepts of strategy and methods. In order for your department to operate successfully it must accomplish two major elements in its functions. The first is obvious. It must do whatever it does well. If your department teaches biology and prepares students for transfer to four year schools in scientific and health related fields then, in order to be effective, your department must aptly prepare those students to succeed at their transfer institutions. This aspect of your department's operations is sometimes referred to as methods.

What may not be so obvious however is the second element -- deciding what things do. If this seems like a moot question, consider the vast array of issues that may compete for the attention of a typical department and department chair. You may be faced with need to devote attention to such issues as transfer/articulation, orientation for new students, curriculum revisions, advisory councils, tech prep partnerships, grant applications, retention strategies, maintaining pace with technology, writing across the curriculum, program accreditation, faculty evaluation and development, recruiting and developing adjunct faculty, critical thinking, classroom research, diversity and equity issues, integration of international perspectives and many others. Doing the right things, or the most effective things, out of a myriad of possible choices, is the content of the second element, which is often referred to as strategy. The kinds of questions that the element of strategy seeks to address are: which do you undertake first?; which do you not undertake at all?; to which do you devote the precious time and financial resources of your

department in order to maximize your effectiveness?; how do you decide?; and who is involved in the decision making process?

Strategic planning, as the name implies, is specifically structured to focus your department's resources on doing the things that will be most effective for the department's success, as you define it. It is a structured process consisting of a number of discrete and specific steps which include:

- the clarification of the essential values of your department, and the development of a departmental mission statement,
- the analysis of your department's strengths and weaknesses and its external threats and opportunities,
- the identification of key areas for attention and development of goals within those key areas,
- the development of specific operational plans to accomplish those goals,
- the implementation of those plans and,
- the evaluation of results, which leads into further plan development.

The strategic planning process is done not by the department chair working in isolation, but with the full involvement and participation of the entire department, and with input from as many of the constituencies which are affected by the department's operations as can be managed. The strategic planning process is extremely powerful in focusing a department's attention on what is important, and in achieving a forceful consensus on what the priorities are for departmental attention. It also coalesces the energy of department members on those priority issues and motivates their participation in key activities to address those priorities.

The purpose of this paper and workshop is not to provide detailed instruction on how to accomplish strategic planning. However, the National Community College Chair Academy has resources and can refer you to resources to help you in the process. The purpose of this paper is to provide the introduction to strategic planning concepts and to discuss their implication and use in terms of your budgetary process. The introduction to the concepts has been briefly covered by the above; the budgetary discussion is included in the following section.

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND THE BUDGET

Having clearly developed your department's priorities for attention, having decided as a group on what your department should address to most effectively serve its purposes, and having mapped our specific kinds of activities which need to take place in order to proceed, the budgetary process becomes simplified, and the base for your budgetary requests becomes much more powerful. Basically, your well-developed strategic plan now drives your budget requests. You ask for the resources to accomplish the priority items which you have developed. If developing strong working articulations is a major initiative, and you have developed operational plans to visit eight four-year schools in the surrounding area, then you request funds to undertake that. If a tech prep initiative is key to your being successful, then you ask for funds to support such specific activities as joint curriculum development or meetings with area high school faculty.

Your department is no longer caught between the extremes of blue sky wish lists or business as usual. You request funds to accomplish certain goals and you are able to support those requests by the well thought out process of strategic planning.

A clear advantage to your department of basing requests on a strategic plan, is that the expectations between your administration and your department become very clear. The administration of your college also has its priorities. Your departmental request may be lower than another department's or may not be a top priority area in college-wide planning. You may not get a full time faculty member for that new program that you would like to develop, but at least you can say, "without this resource, this is what we will be limited to." You offer your administration an easy decision making tool. If we don't get this, then we can't do that.

You can then concentrate your efforts on those fruitful areas of your plan which are supported by resources. Your department need not feel demoralized by not receiving "blue sky" funding, but can proceed, within the realistic limitations which we all face to one degree or another, to do what can be done. Or, if an initiative is vital and there are no funds available from operating budgets, your strategic planning provides a powerful vehicle to work with other sources such as grant funding, or support from business or industry.

CONCLUSION

I began this paper by asking you to consider how planning and budgeting are connected in your college and department. An ideal process might find both a college-wide and departmental strategic planning process in place which examines key values and purposes, analyzes both the external environment and internal resources, generates essential strategies to most effectively address vital issues, develops clear priorities for action, and allocates budgetary resources based on the results of this thorough, pervasive, and thoughtful process.

This ideal process may not exist at your college. It probably does not. But you can, through your own departmental strategic planning process, create such an environment for your own planning and budgeting. In the challenging, dynamic, resource-limited era in which we find ourselves, such actions will be more and more necessary. I hope that this paper will encourage you to explore the possibilities of strategic planning, and strategically based budgeting, as a powerful tools for your department's success.